



Commandant  
United States Coast Guard

2100 Second Street, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20593-0001  
Staff Symbol: G-CQM  
Phone: 202-267-2299

COMDTINST 5216.6  
JUN 13 2000

## COMMANDANT INSTRUCTION 5216.6

Subj: WRITING IN PLAIN LANGUAGE TO INCREASE EFFECTIVENESS

Ref: (a) Presidential Memorandum of 1 June 1998, Plain Language in Government Writing  
(b) Vice Presidential Memorandum of 28 July 1998, Implementing the Presidential Memorandum on Plain Language  
(c) DOT Secretary's Memorandum of 5 April 1999, Plain Language

1. **PURPOSE:** This Instruction announces Coast Guard's implementation of a government-wide requirement to use Plain Language writing standards. This Instruction also provides sources of information to help Coast Guard people learn and use those standards.
2. **ACTION:** Area commanders and districts commanders, commanders of maintenance and logistics commands, commanding officers of headquarters units, assistant commandants for directorates, Chief Counsel, and heads of special staffs at Headquarters must ensure that all personnel within their area of responsibility are aware of this Instruction and use Plain Language in their writing.
3. **BACKGROUND:** To improve efficiency at all organizational levels, the Coast Guard is aggressively seeking innovative means to better manage workload. Plain Language writing reduces administrative effort created by rework due to misunderstandings and enhances communication with our customers.
  - a. The intent of references (a) and (b) is to make it easier for Federal agencies to conduct business with their customers, both internal and external. In reference (c), the Secretary expanded the scope of "Plain Language" to all Department of Transportation documents. This includes regulations, correspondence, forms, manuals and periodicals.

DISTRIBUTION – SDL No. 137

	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z
A																										
B	16	2	11		1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
C	14				43	2					10															
D				54		1		10																		
E																										
F																										
G																										
H																										

NON-STANDARD DISTRIBUTION: QPC OFFICES (13); Field Public Affairs Offices (9); Field legal offices (9)

- b. The Coast Guard's increased public visibility and interaction through such mediums as the Internet, make it increasingly important that our documents are easy to understand. Plain Language writing contributes to efficiency and reduces burdens on the public.

#### COMDTINST 5216.6

- c. The Correspondence Manual, COMDTINST M5216.4 (series), included "Plain Language" policy guidance since 1988. The Coast Guard also includes Plain Language standards in regulations.
  - d. Commandant (G-SII), (G-LRA) and (G-IPA) have recently developed formal plans which build on past success and assure continuous improvement in written communication.
4. POLICY: Coast Guard managers, supervisors, and originators of written documents shall become familiar with Plain Language concepts. They should also model Plain Language in all their own written communications and reward subordinates for applying Plain Language.
5. BASIC PLAIN LANGUAGE STANDARDS: These are the most common Plain Language techniques-
- a. Use common, everyday words except for necessary technical terms;
  - b. Use pronouns (including "you");
  - c. Use the active voice; and
  - d. Keep sentences short.
6. RESOURCES: Currently available resources and points of contact are listed below.
- a. [www.plainlanguage.gov](http://www.plainlanguage.gov) (self-tutorial)
  - b. Correspondence Manual, COMDTINST M5216.4 (series)
  - c. For CG internal documents: Commandant (G-SII) 202-267-2328
  - d. For CG regulatory documents: Commandant (G-LRA) 202-267-0129
  - e. For non-regulatory public use: Commandant (G-IPA) 202-267-2870